



# PARENTS' GUIDE TO ASSESSMENTS IN NEW JERSEY

In spring 2015, students in New Jersey took new assessments aligned to New Jersey's State Academic Standards. The new assessments gauge how well students are mastering the standards and ultimately how ready they are for college and careers after graduation. This document highlights the end-of-year summative assessments for English language arts (ELA) and mathematics, which were developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC).

## WHY NEW ASSESSMENTS?

Teachers and principals talk a lot about assessments, which are used to measure students' academic achievement. This document highlights the end-of-year summative assessments, which judge (1) student progress toward mastering state standards and (2) program and school effectiveness. For other assessments used, see box at right.

The new state tests reflect higher academic standards adopted by New Jersey. They focus on the critical-thinking, problem-solving, and reasoning skills students need to be successful in today's world. The tests will not only evaluate student progress toward college and career readiness, but also show teachers and families where a student needs help or is excelling so they are able to personalize instruction and meet individual student needs. These tests provide important information to help us ensure all students, regardless of income

or family background, have access to a world-class education that will prepare them for success in the next grade and beyond.

## Types of assessments

**Classroom-based:** Individual tests given by teachers as needed throughout the year to assess knowledge and skills in specific areas

**Interim:** The same test repeated at set intervals to measure student growth over time

**Summative:** End-of-year assessments administered by the state to measure student performance against a common set of standards

*This document addresses summative assessments.*

## THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:

- Overview of new assessments which measure student proficiency against more advanced standards
- Overview of accountability for students, teachers and schools
- Additional resources for parents



The new state assessments replaced the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK) in English language arts (ELA) and math, and the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) in the 2014-15 school year.

### **WHO HELPED CREATE THE TEST?**

Hundreds of classroom teachers, higher education faculty, subject experts and school administrators from participating states have dedicated thousands of hours to the development of the tests and will continue to be involved at every step. More than 30 educators and other experts, including parents and community members, reviewed each test question. Higher education professors and instructors have also collaborated with classroom teachers since the beginning to ensure the assessments track student progress toward college and career readiness.

## **What is different about the new assessments?**

### **ELA assessments demonstrate:**

- Whether students can read and comprehend texts of varying complexities
- How well students can integrate information across sources to make a persuasive argument
- The degree to which students can use context to determine the meaning of academic vocabulary

### **Math assessments demonstrate:**

- Whether students understand and can use important math ideas, including number sense, algebraic thinking, geometry, and analyzing data
- The extent to which students can use math facts and reasoning skills to solve real-world problems
- How well students can make math arguments

# Benefits of New Assessments:

- Computer-based assessments replaced pencil and paper tests (exceptions will be made for schools that do not yet have the technology). Computer-based assessments are more efficient, innovative, and engaging—and they enable teachers and parents to better monitor student progress at multiple points.
- The assessments allow students to show their work and explain their reasoning so teachers can better understand what they know and where there are gaps in learning that need to be addressed.
- Rather than focusing on what a child has memorized through multiple choice questions, the new tests ask students to apply skills like thinking, reasoning and justifying answers—showing what they know and can do.
- The tests do not lend themselves to “teaching to the test.” Since they focus on applying skills, it is the daily practice of these skills in the classroom that will serve as the best preparation for the tests.
- The new assessments are designed to provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for students with disabilities and English language learners—allowing these students to perform to their potential. Accommodations are available with the goal of making the assessments more accessible and to produce results that are valid for these students. For students with disabilities, the online assessments will address visual, auditory and physical access barriers. These students will be able to take a test individualized to meet their needs at the same time as other students in their class. Tools have also been developed to help English language learners demonstrate their knowledge in the various content areas (e.g., math, science and social science), regardless of their level of proficiency in English.



## College and career readiness defined:

The level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or in a high-quality certificate program that enables students to enter a career pathway with potential future advancement.

# Sample Questions

The following questions are representative of those found on the new assessments. For more examples visit [parcconline.org/assessments/practice-tests](http://parcconline.org/assessments/practice-tests).

## SAMPLE QUESTION FOR 4TH GRADE MATH STUDENTS

Three classes at Lakeview School are going on a field trip. The table shows the number of people in each class, including the teacher.

They can choose to use buses, vans, and cars.



Buses have 20 seats



Vans have 16 seats



Cars have 5 seats

	Total number of people
Mrs. Ruiz's Class	23
Mr. Yang's Class	25
Mrs. Evans' Class	24

Which three combinations can be used to take all three classes on a field trip?

- 1 bus and 4 vans                       1 bus and 8 cars  
 3 vans and 11 cars                     2 buses and 3 vans and 4 cars  
 1 bus and 1 van and 6 cars

Submit Answer

## SAMPLE QUESTION FOR 6TH GRADE ENGLISH STUDENTS

Students are asked to read a passage from the fictional text "Julie of the Wolves" by Jean C. George and answer the following:

### SAMPLE ITEM

In the passage, the author developed a strong character named Miyax. Think about Miyax and the details the author used to create the character. The passage ends with Miyax waiting for the black wolf to look at her.

Write an original story to continue where the passage ended. In your story, be sure to use what you have learned about the character Miyax as you tell what happens to her next.

Answer:

## SAMPLE QUESTION FOR 10TH GRADE ENGLISH STUDENTS

### SAMPLE ITEM

Use what you have learned from reading "Daedalus and Icarus" by Ovid and "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Triumph" by Anne Sexton to write an essay that provides an analysis of how Sexton transforms Daedalus and Icarus.

As a starting point, you may want to consider what is emphasized, absent, or different in the two texts, but feel free to develop your own focus for analysis.

Develop your essay by providing textual evidence from both texts. Be sure to follow the conventions of standard English.

Answer:

# What Parents Can Expect

The PARCC assessments are designed to measure the new, higher expectations of the state standards. Because the tests measure complex skills, which are different from the skills measured by previous state tests, the new scores on the PARCC test set a new baseline and should not be compared to previous assessment results.

As students and teachers gain the skills and knowledge needed to meet the new higher standards, performance will improve. In other states where more advanced tests have been implemented, students improved their performance after the first year.

## Score Reports

The score report gives you a snapshot of how your child is progressing and shows where he or she excels or needs more support. This information, along with grades, teacher feedback and scores on other tests, will help give a more complete picture of how well your child is performing academically.

The new score reports describing students' results on the new tests will be very different from what we've seen in the past. Scores will be different because the English language arts and math tests are based on a different set of academic standards.

While no single test tells us everything we need to know about how a student is performing in school, these test scores give you additional information you need to know about how your child is progressing.

Here is what you can expect to learn from the report:

- Your student's overall score in the subject area
- What this overall score means
- Your student's strengths and areas for improvement in certain topics in each subject area
- How well your student performed compared to other students in the school, district, state and other states

## Understanding PARCC Assessment Score Card

**Overall Student Performance:** Your student's overall score (out of a possible 850) and performance level (1-5) gives a quick glimpse of whether he or she is on-track with grade-level expectations. Level 1 indicates the greatest need for improvement and Level 5 indicates the strongest performance.

**Performance Levels:** The second page of the report provides information on the different performance levels. They describe how well students met grade-level expectations.

**Score Graph:** The colored graph shows the score ranges for each performance level and where your child's score falls within that range. This gives you an indication of how close your child is to achieving the next level.

**Score Comparisons:** Unlike many previous state test score reports, PARCC score reports show how your student is performing compared to students in the same grade at the same school, across the school district, around the state and across the states administering the PARCC test.

*States score reports may differ depending on the type of assessment a state utilizes and also whether or not it chooses to customize the report. States will report scores in several ways, which can serve different purposes for their stakeholders.*





## How will schools support students during the transition?

New Jersey officials took the lessons learned from the 2015 test to improve the testing experience, including shortening it. Schools have created a variety of models to assist students who are struggling with the standards.

## How are principals, teachers and students held accountable?

If the proposed regulation changes are adopted by the New Jersey Board of Education in the spring of 2016, then starting with the Class of 2020, students will be required to complete the high school PARCC tests in order to graduate. Starting with the Class of 2021, students will have to successfully meet a certain scoring level on the PARCC assessments ELA 10 and Algebra 1 in order to graduate high school. However, students who fail to meet the scoring requirements on the PARCC assessments will have the portfolio appeals process available to them to meet the graduation requirements.

Local school districts will use multiple measures of growth based on effective teaching practices, including growth on test scores, to evaluate teachers and principals. Only approximately 15% of all New Jersey teachers will have student growth on test scores account for their evaluations. For those teachers, growth on test scores makes up only 10% of the total evaluation. Districts will also strengthen their supports for educators with the goal of increasing student improvement.



# Take Action

**Parents are their child's best advocates. As a parent and your child's first teacher you should be informed of the assessment and accountability system that is in place in your child's school. Parents and families must be at the table with school leaders and school districts to ensure that testing is implemented well and with enough resources to ensure success.**

New Jersey should include parents and teachers in thoughtful conversations based on trust, collaboration, and respect. For additional details about the assessment and accountability system, please call New Jersey Department of Education, (877) 900-6960. Here are some questions you might want to ask:

- How many assessments will my child take this school year and where can I access/view the assessment calendar?
- What will happen if my child does not meet proficiency on the new assessments?
- How will the results of tests be used to support my child's learning?
- What can I do, as a parent, to help my child do his or her best?
- How will school evaluations be affected based on results of the new assessments?

Also, be sure to speak with your local school administrators! Ask them to host a parent night in the spring to explain the tests and in the fall to explain test results.

Below is the list of policies and practices that National PTA supports. Check with the Department of Education to determine if New Jersey's policies and practices are aligned.

- National PTA believes that valid assessment does not consist of only a single test score, and that at no time should a single test be considered the sole determinant of a student's academic or work future.
- The National PTA supports nationally agreed upon voluntary standards if they are derived by consensus at the state and local levels. Parents must be involved in this process.
- National PTA believes that assessments provide valuable information to parents, teachers and school leaders about the growth and achievement of their students. Furthermore, having annual data on the performance of students can help inform teaching and learning as well as identify achievement gaps among groups of students within a school and among a school district. National PTA believes assessments are essential to ensure that all students receive a high-quality education.

# Preparing and Supporting Your Child

- Review the testing calendar and work with your child's school to ensure there will be regular and clear communications from the school on the assessments, the results and how they are used.
- Discuss the new tests with your children. Make sure they feel comfortable and understand why they are taking a test.
- With older children, explain that the new assessments were created to make sure they are on track to succeed after graduation and to identify any issues early enough to give them more support.
- Explain to your child that the tests will initially be more challenging. Tell your child you have high expectations and you and the teachers are there to help every step of the way.
- Review test results with your child and his or her teacher.
- Make sure your child has a comfortable place for studying and is prepared mentally and physically for a test.

## Staying informed and involved

- Become familiar with the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards, visit: [state.nj.us/education/cccs](http://state.nj.us/education/cccs)
- To see samples of new test questions and how the assessments were developed, visit: [parconline.org/assessments/practice-tests](http://parconline.org/assessments/practice-tests)
- Read all comments written by the teacher. Ask teachers to explain anything that is unclear and discuss how you can best work together to address areas of improvement for your child.
- Monitor your child's progress and regularly communicate with your child's teachers. If your child needs extra help or wants to learn more about a subject, work with his or her teacher to identify opportunities for tutoring, after-school clubs or other resources.
- Tests are not perfect measures of what a child can do—there are many other factors that might influence a test score. For example, a child can be affected by the way he or she is feeling on test day or the particular classroom setting.
- Meet with your child's teacher as often as possible to discuss his or her progress. Ask for activities to do at home to help prepare for tests and improve your child's proficiency.

## Additional resources

- For more information on assessments in New Jersey, visit: [state.nj.us/education/assessment](http://state.nj.us/education/assessment)
- For more information on school and district performance in New Jersey, visit: [education.state.nj.us/pr](http://education.state.nj.us/pr) or [state.nj.us/education/schools/achievement/index.html](http://state.nj.us/education/schools/achievement/index.html)
- For information on the PARCC consortium, of which New Jersey is a member, visit: [parconline.org](http://parconline.org)
- For information on the assessment score reports and for tips on supporting your child's learning at home, visit: [UnderstandtheScore.org](http://UnderstandtheScore.org)
- For specific learning activities and supplemental homework aligned to the PARCC test, parents can use Be A Learning Hero Skill Builder. Visit: [bealearninghero.org/skill-builder](http://bealearninghero.org/skill-builder)